Auburn Sem. Dec. 24th '42

To "The Society of Inquiry."
of Princeton Theo. Seminary.

Dear Brethren,

Upon reviewing our file of letters we find that we are indebted to you; and though we cannot present a sufficient reason for so long delaying an answer to your letter, yet be assured it may not be found in our indifference to you, or forgetfulness of your welfare. We would always seek an interchange of sentiment and feeling; and thus aim to promote the spiritual interests of each other; encourage amid the manifold discouragements which often rear their hideous summits in our paths; counsel upon the various topics and schemes of pursuit which may engage our attention; and above all consult together upon the best means for forming and advancing a pious efficient and energetic ministry. This latter thought brethren, we think does not enlist a proper degree of meditation from candidates for the sacred office. Our ears are often saluted with the inquiry, how can there be a more godly and powerful ministry established? and we frequently make the same inquiry, forgetting almost that it becometh us to investigate the causes which depreciate the importance, sacredness and efficiency of the office. We need not intimate, dear brethren,

that the fault is not in the Church but in ourselves that we are unlearning it. If permitted through the good providence of God to assume the duties of the ministerial office, we must either aid in forming an elevated standard of clerical perfection, or reduce the present meagre stature of leaders in Israel. The importance of forming a correct estimate of the dignity and owners of the ministry by those who are candidates for the same cannot be questioned. Such an estimation only can lead to ennobling purposes of action, and induce us to adopt a course of conduct worthy the sacredness and object of our vocation. And though much remarked, yet most true it is, that we live in a period of moral history when the tone of ministerial character is experiencing a sensible variation. The complexion of the ministry will undergo a decided change, radical it may be, but certainly affecting its every department. And while we contemplate with silent admiration it may be or perchance with astonishment, the workings of the moral leaven which circumstances (perhaps we may better name them auspicious providences) have thrown into the ministry of reconciliation, in common with the Church, it behooves us expectants of the holy office to stay the change or hasten its operations as our convictions of duty may dictate. We are to remember that a change is not always a reformation; and though we might rationally infer that the ministry could not remain stationary while this wonderful process is pervading every department of society science religion politics and the like, yet shaped its present features, some of which are excellent, the last named

the more distinctive lineaments of a modern character, disastrous may be the consequences. A superficial examination of the condition of the ministry will confirm the belief, that it is falling rapidly from a hortatory startling kind of preaching, to a manner more purely didactic and doctrinal; and perhaps in our day we may observe the pungent & systematic and instructive preaching of Edwards and Dwight again introduced and universally preferred.

The prominent subject of agitation among us at present is the solution of the inquiry, Where is it our duty to go when having completed our theological studies? Various and interesting fields of usefulness seem to beckon us on to their spiritual culture, and invite our efforts with a probable beneficial result. The distant western portion of our immense territory stands preeminent in the view of most of the brethren of the Senior Class, and indeed most of the members of the other classes. The facilities and demands for extensive labors there, can be no longer a matter of speculation. 'Thrust in thy sickle & reap,' we may almost hear coming from that whole tract of country, now a prey to ignorance, credulity, and irreligion of every kind. Brethren, will you heed the call and go forth with us there, with weeping, bearing precious seed, for doubtless we shall come again with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us? The many churches in our own State destitute of the regular preaching of the gospel and anxious to secure it, are also claiming our partial attention; while but very few inquiries are made touching the foreign field.

The situation of our Faculty during this term has been quite peculiar and unpleasant. Dr Richards has been confined to his room most of the session, in consequence of a severe fall upon the pavement in town through nervous debility. His health is now nearly restored. Dr Halsey has been absent at Pittsburgh since September Dr. Dickinson has united the duties of Dr Richards with his own. We have had no cause any intelligence of signal manifestations of Divine influence in our vicinity, but we are expecting and indulge a strong belief that the churches will soon be revived, and careless sinners return home to God in great numbers.

Brethren we intreat your prayers and sympathies, and hope that your Seminary in all its interests may be sustained by the good hand of God. In behalf of Com. of Cor, of Soc. of Inq.

Thomas M. Hodgman Chrm.

Rev. Archibald Alexander D.D.
Princeton Theo. Sem.
Princeton
New Jersey.